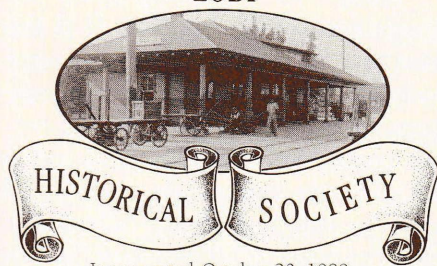


LODI



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EARLY WOODBRIDGE

By Lucy Reller and Ralph Lea



Woodbridge wooden dam built in the 1890's. ▲

The French Canadian fur trappers of the Hudson Bay Company were the first settlers in the early 1840's to work the Mokelumne River area. They built a log cabin and returned for a number of years to trap the beaver along the river.

In 1849 brothers J.P. Sargent and Roswell (Ross) C. Sargent, who started in the New England states, arrived in California near Placerville where they started a trading post and hauling

goods to the miners. A year and a half later they started farming near the future village of Woodbridge and the delta lands to the west. They were among the first, along with George W. Emerson, to farm in this area. They were soon joined by two more brothers, Dr. Jacob L. and Bradley V. Sargent and Jacob Brack, James Talmadge, Mathew Webb and the Chandelers brothers.

The Sargents built three cabins, planted barley and tried brush fences that didn't quite work. After selling the land near Woodbridge, they finally

▲
Blake and Charles Woods, only sons of the founder of Woodbridge, Jeremiah Woods.

Photo courtesy of San Joaquin County Historical Society.



▲ In 1868 John Rutledge built the corner store to sell general merchandise. Judge Young, Justice of the Peace in 1950, formerly resided in the rear wooden section on the left.

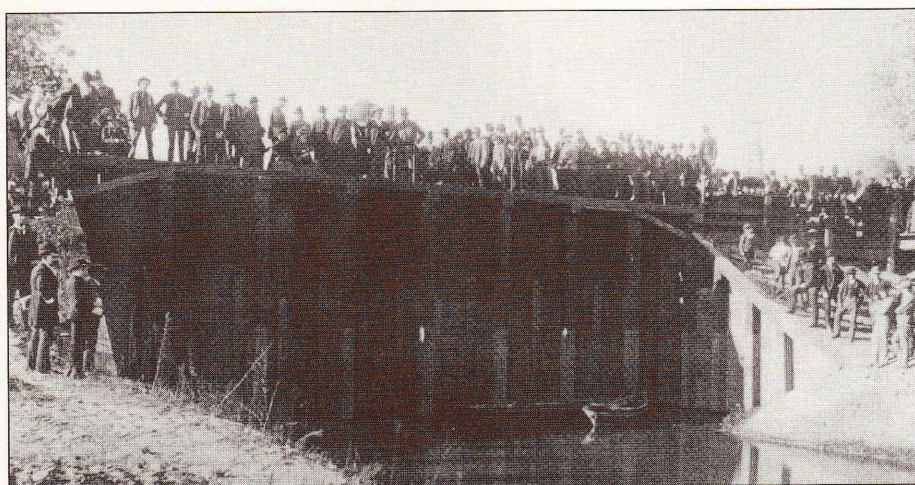
settled a few miles southwest where they successfully farmed.

The person who founded the village, Jeremiah H. Woods was born in Virginia and was living at Staples' Ferry before moving the eight miles down the Mokelumne River where he would soon establish his own ferry and town. Woods and Alexander McQueen purchased the land from the Sargent brothers. In October 1852, J.H. Woods built a cabin for his family and had his plans for a new road from Stockton to the Davis bridge on the Dry Creek and on to Sacramento passing over his newly built ferry boat to cross the Mokelumne River. He wanted the San Jose to Sacramento traffic to go through his town. A year later San Joaquin County declared the Lower Sacramento a public road. Jeremiah H. Woods gave the stage free ferriage. He then had a stage station. The only sailing vessel to make its way to Woods

Ferry, unloaded her freight in the winter of 1852.

The following spring the central valley experienced a flood that made it extremely difficult to supply the gold miners with necessary food and supplies. Mr. Woods went to Stockton and bought goods, bringing them to Woods Ferry in row boats where he fitted out a pack train for the hungry miners. After the flood subsided and the area dried out, Woods cut timber for manufacturers in Stockton to make plow handles and plow beams.

The Elkhorn Township was being settled and schools were needed. In 1854 a school district was formed for the Woods Ferry area. The first school was located at the northeast corner of Lower Sacramento and Turner Roads. That same year Jeremiah Woods erected the Woods Hotel for teamsters and travelers.



▲ Celebrating the opening of the head gate of the new Woodbridge Canal, 1892. Photo courtesy of the San Joaquin County Historical Society.

Things were looking good for Woods Ferry and on July 4, 1855 the town and its biggest supporters were ready to celebrate. Many people came from a wide area for the elaborate two day event. The ten dollar ticket price charged was not nearly enough to cover the huge expenses – \$250.00 for the dance band, \$75.00 worth of flowers procured from San Francisco and a large variety of expensive food.

The next year, Jeremiah H. Woods built a home for his family. Most of the lumber for the structure came by boat from the east coast at a cost of \$100.00 a thousand board feet. The house later belonged to Dr. Arthur Horace Bentley who arrived in Woods Ferry in 1856 and practiced medicine for the next five years.

In 1857 the Woods Ferry Post Office was opened. A year later, Dr. Bentley opened a general merchandise business and that summer, Jeremiah H. Woods replaced his ferry with a toll bridge that paid for itself in just a few months by charging a basic rate of \$1.00 for the crossing of a wagon and team.

In April 1859 the San Joaquin county surveyor laid out the town of Woods Ferry and on October 6, 1859 the plat was recorded as the village of Woodbridge. Within a month Jeremiah H. Woods and his wife had sold eight lots for \$400.00 to \$500.00.

In 1860 James B. Folger, John C. Thompson, H.D. Shinn and William H. DeVries arrived in Woodbridge to find that MacIntosh had a two story wagon and blacksmith shop, Wood's livery and feed stable, Graham and Perry's carpenter shop, Daniel Grist's drinks and fruit store, Dan Kelly's boots and shoes, Neeley and Parr's saddle trees and harnesses plus four saloons and the Woods Hotel.

In November 1860, Woodbridge was one of the strongest Republican precincts in the county. They had 128 votes cast for Lincoln.

The middle of April 1861, the city of Stockton held their election for city office but the news of the start of the Civil War at Fort Sumter caused an uproar. Slavery was the topic of the

day and there was strong feelings everywhere. Men from both the north and south became alarmed.

A few days after the surrender of Fort Sumter an important meeting was held in Woodbridge to unite the Union supporters before the California secession group could act.

Over 300 people assembled in a carpenter shop in Woodbridge. Twenty speakers talked for 4 hours with heated discussions on the pro and con of supporting the Union cause. Pistols and knives were drawn when a resolution was put forward to support the Union cause peacefully or forcibly if necessary. The group adjourned the meeting into the street and opposite sides collected. When it was seen that the "Peace Policy" outnumbered the "Coercionists" by three to one, the men went home but the news spread throughout the state.



By 1893 Woodbridge was packing all types of fresh fruit for shipping on the S.J. and S.N. Railroad. ▲



▲ Woodbridge Insane Asylum building divided into two buildings after the doctors moved to Stockton. Photo courtesy of the San Joaquin County Historical Society.

Charles McLaughlin, Central Pacific Railroad contractor was a good friend of the Wood's family and son Blake can remember one evening at the house when McLaughlin told Mrs. Woods, "Phoebe we are going to locate the railroad through here." This was before the flood of 1862 and the untimely death of Jeremiah Woods.

In late December 1861 in the granddaddy of all floods, Woods' bridge floated off down stream about a half mile. This was just two years after the bridge was built. This disaster left an opening for D.J. Locke and the river steamers to pass up the river. At least every six years, floods became part of the history of Woodbridge and other towns along the Mokelumne River.

The town and area was growing at a fast rate as well as many large farms. Freeman Mills started a large orchard and S.H. Axtel planted 3,000 apple, peach and apricot trees.

Following the flood of 1862 three buildings that survived were moved from Benson's Ferry



Woodbridge, Thanksgiving, Nov. 29, 1894. Ninia Rush, ▲ Carl May, Helen King, Fred Perrott, Ruth Thompson, Ollie King, Lonnie Rhodes and Zena Covell.



1895, Woodbridge Presbyterian Church. Photo courtesy of Carol Dean.



May 29, 1895; l-r: S.J.V.C. Boarding House, R.R. Round House (Valley Springs), ▲ Woods Grammar School and United Brethren Church Photo courtesy of Celia Thompson Collection, Lodi Library.



▲ *San Joaquin Valley College Boarding House, Feb. 14, 1895. Professor Waltrip on porch; Maude King, Mattie Niorse, Solomon Blodgett, Football Team, Mr. Allaray and son and Mr. Blodgett.*



▲ *San Joaquin Valley College, Woodbridge Football Team, Feb. 14, 1895. (l-r), Top row: Homer Bustner, Fenton Ham, Walter Garrison, Frank Ralls, Walter Meyers, Solomon Blodgett, Arthur Thomas. Bottom row: Ed Van Vranken, Louis Powers, Will Thomas, Ray Powers, Humbert McClelland, George Rutledge, and Lonnie Rhodes. Photo courtesy of Celia Thompson, Lodi Library.*

to Woodbridge. One was used as a hotel by George A. Keith and another became the asylum for Clark and Langdon.

The nearby Woods School had 113 pupils and the town had a 300,000 kiln brick yard selling brick for \$8.00 a thousand and hauling them as far as Washoe. Three local brick buildings had been built. A tinshop, jeweler and the second hotel, The Union with Mr. Corsaw as the proprietor. Horace Greeley came to Woodbridge and dined in the hotel.

Jeremiah H. Woods met a tragic death on June 4, 1864 which changed the growth and future of this upcoming town of Woodbridge. A few days

earlier a young man, William Wilkinson just 22 years of age and living a mile north of town walked by the Jeremiah H. Woods home when a dog ran out and bit the young man on the thigh. He had no weapon to defend himself but a few days later he was carrying a shotgun. This time the dog did not attack. A little later Wilkinson saw Woods' dog on the street with other dogs and shot him.

Wilkinson left

his gun at the Union Hotel and went to John Ruters' saloon. Woods hastily entered the saloon to accost the young man and ask if he killed his dog. Wilkinson replied that he did and Woods struck the young man twice and grasping his hair pulled him to his knees. The boy drew his pocket knife and made a blind stab at Woods. The blade entered a vital spot and Jeremiah H. Woods, at age 43, was dead within 10 minutes. William Wilkinson gave himself up and was confined to jail in Stockton. The next morning he was taken before Justice Baldwin and after hearing the evidence of five eyewitnesses, discharged the prisoner on grounds of self defense.

A short time later Mrs. Woods sold the bridge to the local farmers for \$2,000.00 and it was then made toll free.

A year later when the U.S. Government finally opened section 34 of T,4N,RGE for sale, the settlers failed to protect their titles to the land and most had to purchase the patents from a third party a few years later. Even the Masonic Lodge had to buy back their cemetery and a new town plat of Woodbridge was filed June 27, 1878.

In 1865 the "Woodbridge Weekly Messenger" was started and lasted until Mokelumne Station (Lodi) started building, three years later. A December 1, 1865 article reported there were 300 inhabitants in Woodbridge with a flourishing flour mill that was run by the Rankin brothers.

This was the year Horace Bentley built his new brick store and was occupied as a residence by his family which included his wife Etta and three children. He was the agent for the Wells Fargo and Company Express. Bentley's



▲ *The approach to the Woodbridge bridge over the Mokelumne was an adventure in itself, 1900.*

▼ The flood of 1907 did quite a lot of damage to the road at Woodbridge.



▲ The 1907 flood made a lake of Woodbridge; the United Brethren Church in the middle.

▼ Woodbridge College and students.



building was very modern for the times. It was lighted with gas and he had a pump for water which was used for his large garden.

Rankin sold his Grist Mill to Green and Wrist who continued to operate for fourteen years. It stood near the present intake of the irrigation canal.

Charles O. Ivory, Lodi's first merchant came to Woodbridge from Stockton in 1867 and started a general store with John Burt. A year later John R. Rutledge, grandfather of long time resident Charles L. Newton built the one story brick store building at the northwest corner of Main and Augusta Streets.

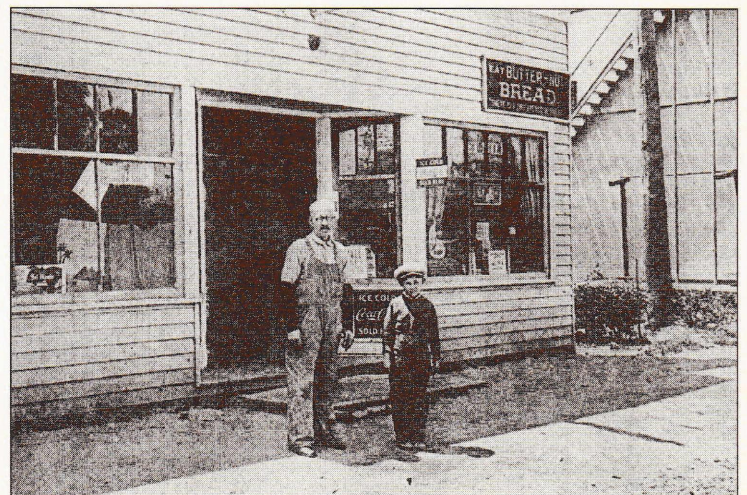
One block north on Main Street, where all the businesses were located, John Levinsky, one of our first attorneys and father of Henry and Arthur, moved down from San Andreas and opened the fourth general merchandising store in Woodbridge.

In 1871 Doctors Asa Clark and Langdon established the Nevada Insane Asylum in Woodbridge. Six years later the establishment was moved to Stockton.

That same year the first public school in Woodbridge was started. Mr. Morehead was in charge of 74 pupils in the school that had been moved from Lower Sacramento and Turner Roads.

The Woodbridge Masonic Lodge was started August 5, 1858 and their first hall was a two story wooden building located on the west bank of the Mokelumne River and opposite the Bentley store. The lower floor was used as a public school and later as a community church. Lodge meetings were held upstairs.

The Woodbridge I.O.O.F. Lodge was started August 2,



▲ The Quenell Store on Augusta Street, Woodbridge, next to the Masonic Temple. After original owner Nelson Quenell, came Ed Rivinius, Walt Saylor and Buddy Cash.



▲ Home of Albert Stokes Thomas. Shows boarding house in background. This house was north of San Joaquin Valley College. Photo courtesy of the San Joaquin County Historical Society.

1860 and held their meetings in the Masonic Lodge until 1874 when John Levinsky remodeled his store and added a second story which the Odd Fellows occupied.

The Woodbridge Grange was organized in 1873, the Good Templars in 1877 and a year later the Woodbridge Knights of Pythians started. They all met in the Masonic Hall. In 1883 a new Masonic Temple was built one block west.

The most active church group in Woodbridge was the United Brethren who organized in 1864 and 14 years later built their own brick building costing \$2,700.00. They had 58 members. The Presbyterians and Methodists had no church building of their own but St. Anne's Catholic Church bought the old school house for their church.

T.R. Burkett's Butcher Shop and his wrapping paper was the start of a subscription list to raise money for a local high school. Judge Thompson and J.P. Folger were able to convince 150 local citizens to donate \$8,500.00 for a building. Albert Thomas provided the land. The area was cleared and the Stockton to Sacramento stage route running through the middle of the grounds

was abandoned and a new road opened north and west of the school. By 1875 the 42' x 64' two story building was completed on the outside. The trustees were J. Bentley, J.G. Thompson, J. Brack, V. Jahant, Justice Schomp and E. Rutledge. Professor S.L. Morehead, principal of Woods School was hired to conduct the school and in lieu of any salary the property was to become his after a period of time. Complications arose and the contract was canceled before it started.

The United Brethren In Christ Church of Woodbridge hosted the California Conference in 1878 in their new church. The Brethren were offered the opportunity to acquire the Woodbridge Academy. On September 10,



▲ The Woodbridge fig tree.

1879 they dedicated it the Woodbridge Seminary with Darius A. Mobley, President and Klinefelter and Ridenour completing the staff for a high school. Four years later it was enlarged

to college level and the next year 137 students were enrolled.

Taxes supported high schools in Stockton in 1894 and Lodi two years later. This caused the college to have financial problems and it closed in 1897. The property and main building were deeded to the Woods School District who held grammar school classes in the college building until 1922. A new grammar school had been built two years earlier but burned to the ground during the depression years.

Woodbridge had a railroad and deep water port access thirteen years after missing out on the first chance.

Dr. Horace Bentley, Jacob Brack, Watson Green, D.J. Locke, B.G. Langford and others saw the need for a narrow gauge railroad from nearby farming towns to waiting ships at Brack's Landing and Port Costa where they could transport their crops anywhere and avoid the high price of the Southern Pacific Railroad.

In June, 1882 the first train ran from Brack's Landing to Woodbridge. There were speakers and Houseman's Band played for the jubilant crowd. Supper was served at the Plummer House and a Grand Ball in the evening ended the day long celebration.

Although the railroad tracks were removed from Woodbridge to Brack's Landing in 1897, the line was used to Valley Springs until recently.

WOODBIDGE FIG TREE

The famous Woodbridge Fig Tree was planted by S.H. Axtell in 1857. In 1909 the fig tree was owned by J.D. Axtell. At that time the body of the tree was twelve feet in circumference. The overall outer circumference is a circle of 309 feet spreading 95 feet from north to south. The immense branches had grown down to the ground where they had taken root and then grown upward again. The overhanging branches resembled a huge house and was an ideal spot for an outing. Picnics were held there most weekends. It was mentioned in Ripley's "Believe It or Not" for its size. The fig tree and 65 acre ranch was sold to John Nipkau in 1910 for \$20,000.00.

The Woodbridge fig tree produced two crops a year for over 100 years before it started to recede. The aging giant was cut down when the River Meadow subdivision was started a quarter of a century ago.

In 1886 Byron De La Beckwith, Lodi druggist applied to the state for irrigation water from the Mokelumne at Woodbridge. Two years later he hired Allen T. Covell to engineer the canal system and dam. On November 12, 1891 a large crowd was on hand to open the wooden head gate and fill the canal which had been excavated with wheelbarrows and hand power. The wood dam failed with the high water in the spring of 1895. It was rebuilt and failed in 1897 and again in 1902. A concrete structure was finally built in 1910. The Canal Company that started the system failed but the Irrigation District that exists today started in 1924, the same year Woodbridge Golf and Country Club was incorporated with an entrance fee of \$15.00.

In 1890 Frank Wallace Edson came to Woodbridge from Massachusetts and opened Edison's Livery Stable on Main Street. He had buggies and some horses for rent to those people who didn't own their own horse and to accommodate travelers who came in on the stage.

A son, Frank Hutchins Edson was born in 1895 and worked for his father while attending high school. After taking mechanics training in Oakland, young Frank returned to the business and in 1916 became in charge. Horses were still available but you could rent an automobile for the same price and since most people had not yet learned how to operate an automobile one of the Edson's had to do the driving. A stage or "jitney service" was in demand. As more families purchased their own cars the rental service soon became a garage and service station. Frank H. Edson was better known as a renter of large and small portable water pumps for farmers in the irrigation district.

Both sides of Main Street in Woodbridge, which was the old road from Stockton and Sacramento, contained all the businesses and the early built

homes were either on this road or street. One of the best known landmarks of Woodbridge is the Bentley Store built in 1865 for Dr. Horace Bentley by Frank Perrin, a Woodbridge carpenter and builder. The upstairs was his residence and the first floor was used as a General Merchandise and Drug Store. At one time the building housed the post office, a tin shop and for over fifty years the agent of Wells Fargo Express Company. In July of 1880 Wells Fargo quoted the prices for shipments to San Francisco: Gold Bullion \$1.50 and Silver \$2.25 for hauling a thousand dollars.

Horace Bentley died in 1908 at the age of 80 and C.L. Hall, his son-in-law ran the store for a few years. The business was later purchased by George Rutledge, Charles Rutledge and H.P. Covell. They operated the building for a while and then sold to J.G. Journay, who next sold to C.W. Hunting, a farmer and clerk of the Acampo Store. In 1916, Hunting sold to Elbert Allen Covell, another farmer, who ran the General Store until 1932. The bottom floor was empty for years and then Merle Weien purchased the Bentley Store and remodeled it into a restaurant, bar, dance hall and private club with hotel accommodations on the second floor.

Baseball was a very popular sport and Woodbridge had been fielding a



▲ Woodbridge United Brethren brick church.
Photo courtesy of San Joaquin Cty. Historical Society.

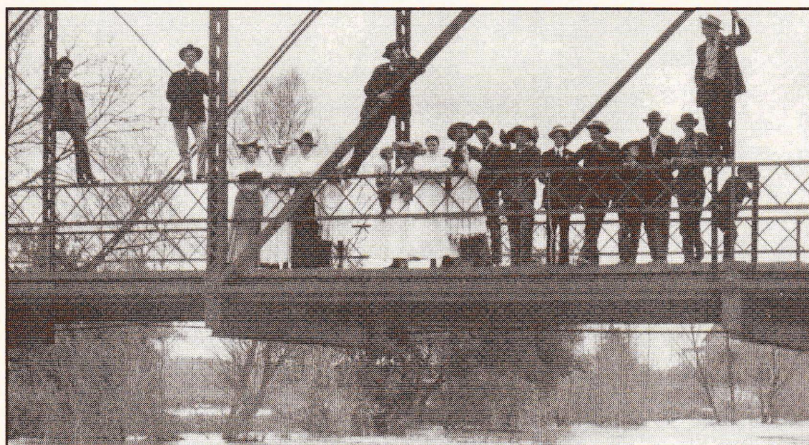
team since the San Joaquin Valley College started playing in Woodbridge.

Bing Taylor remembers his father telling about a game he attended in the 1920's. Blake Woods, son of the founder, was in the stands as usual and with his high shrill voice was heard to yell, after a Woodbridge player threw the ball to the wrong base, "Lester (Covell) you got a million dollar arm and a 15 cent brain." Blake died in 1929 and Woodbridge lost one of its colorful residents.

In 1921 bachelor brothers, Blake and Charles Woods, sons of the town founder Jeremiah H. Woods, recall some of the events and the locations. Blake was living in a home that was



Picnics were held under Woodbridge's giant fig tree, mentioned in Ripley's ▲ Believe or Not for its size, 95 feet north to south.



▲ Woodbridge Academy students on the Mokelumne River bridge.

built in 1860 by Frank Perrin and H.C. Gorman. It was originally built as a shop building that was also used as a meeting hall. This is where the Union meeting before the start of the Civil War was held. Later this large structure was divided into two houses.

Across the street from those houses was the home of "Judge" H.D. Shinn. Nearby were the homes of partners John C. Thompson and James B. Folger who in 1861 had over 3,000 acres west of town stocked with the finest breeds of cattle. Charles L. Newton later

moved into the Folger house after purchasing the Woodbridge Butcher Shop of Thompson and Folger. Charles graduated from San Joaquin Valley College and married Katherine Jahant. Charles was elected county supervisor for four terms. His father, Dr. Jabez came to Woodbridge in 1869 and ran the Keith Hotel.

In 1878 the population of Woodbridge had been reduced to about 200 people. They still had the J.P. Clay Brick Company, L.D. Green was now running the Flouring Mill, Rutledge and Bentley both had general merchandising stores, Cope's Harness Shop, McCullough's Blacksmith and Wagon Maker, Butcher Shop, Turner and Robinetts Union saloons, Plummers' Hotel, Gerards Jewelry and Variety Store and Thompson's Boots and Shoe Manufacturer. E. Dayton and A. Trafton were physicians and Livery and Feed Stable (maybe a veterinary). L.H. Hood was Constable and Edward Young was the Justice of the Peace. The Reverend William M. Winter was the pastor of the South Methodist Church and Reverend J.L. Field, Minister lived in Woodbridge.

Colonel F.T. Gilbert, historian

▼ The Bentley Store became Weien's Tavern about 1937 and now the Feed and Fuel on Main Street, Woodbridge.



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wrote the history of San Joaquin County that was published by T.H. Thompson and A.A. West in 1879. This work was the base for all of future history.

It was 1923 before George H. Tinkham added any new material to our history along with biographical sketches of the leading men and women identified with our growth and development.

California State Department of Natural Resources designated Woodbridge a Historical Landmark in 1939, some 89 years after three Englishmen, George W. Emerson, J.P. Sargent and his brother Ross C. Sargent settled at this spot.

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